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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

4 MAR 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dominick L. DiCarlo  
 Assistant Secretary for International  
 Narcotics Matters  
 Department of State

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SUBJECT: Potential Political Reaction to US Support For a  
 Burmese Herbicide Aerial Spray Program

In response to your request for information on possible foreign reaction to a US-supported aerial spray program for opium poppy in Burma, the attached memorandum presents our assessments as to how a number of countries may react to such a campaign. The list of countries discussed is not all-inclusive, but represents the range of reaction we think likely. The memorandum was prepared in the Office of Global Issues with contributions from the Office of East Asian Analysis, Office of European Analysis, Office of Soviet Analysis, and Office of Scientific and Weapons Research.

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the judgments expressed are somewhat speculative.

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*Robert M. Gates*  
 Robert M. Gates  
 Deputy Director for Intelligence

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## Attachment:

Potential Foreign Reaction to US Support  
 for a Burmese Aerial Spray Eradication Program  
GI M 83-10048, February 1983

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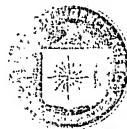
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28 February 1983

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## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

28 February 1983

**Potential Foreign Reaction to US Support  
For A Burmese Aerial Spray Eradication Program**

Summary

*Foreign reactions to a US-supported aerial herbicide spray eradication program to kill opium poppies in Burma would depend in large part on the extent that program opponents are able to command an international forum to publicize their views and the degree to which such opponents can link the eradication campaign to human rights concerns. The 1984 UN review of the 1977 Environmental Modifications Treaty might provide such a forum, although it is likely that advanced warning of such intentions would be sufficient for the United States to effectively counter charges promulgated for propaganda effect.*

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*Should such an eradication program receive widespread publicity, the reaction would vary by country.*

*[redacted] we believe--based on actions in the past--that:*

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- o Most West European and Scandinavian countries would support the United States, or at a minimum evidence little criticism;*

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*This memorandum was prepared in the International Security Issues Division, Office of Global Issues with contributions from the Office of East Asian Analysis, Office of European Analysis, Office of Soviet Analysis, and Office of Scientific and Weapons Research. Information available as of 28 February 1983 was incorporated. Comments and questions are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, Strategic Narcotics Branch, OGI,*

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- o The Netherlands and Belgium would oppose aerial application of herbicides, as might Japan;
- o China might choose to remain silent or even support the program; and
- o Vietnam and, most likely, Burmese insurgent groups would make maximum propaganda use of the situation.
- o We cannot predict the Soviet reaction. The Soviet Union might be expected to mount a propaganda effort against a spray program such as the massive campaign that they have conducted against Agent Orange. However, they have not chosen to capitalize on the Mexican eradication program and might choose to ignore an opium poppy eradication program in Burma.

Although other countries could be examined, we believe the countries cited represent the range of reaction likely to US support of the eradication program. [redacted]

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#### Environmental Modification Treaty: A Potential Forum

The 1984 UN Review Conference of the 1977 Environmental Modification Treaty could become a focal point for propaganda charges by signatory countries who might wish to discredit a US-sponsored Burmese eradication program. Article 1 of the Treaty prohibits parties of the convention from engaging in military or hostile modification of the environment which results in widespread (over 100 square kilometers), longlasting (over several months), and severe (serious harm to human life) damage to other members of the convention. Assistance to nonmember states engaging in environmental modification is also prohibited. Peaceful uses of environmental modifications are sanctioned, however. Although Burma is not Party to the convention and would be using the defoliants on its own territory, propagandists could argue that Burma is engaged in hostilities against a well-armed insurgent group. The use of US-supplied herbicides against insurgent-controlled areas could thus be construed as violations of the treaty. Any indiscriminate use of the herbicide by Burmese forces would enhance the credibility of these charges. Finally, an effort might be made to link a poppy eradication campaign to Burmese efforts to produce mustard gas, assuming these activities are known to opponents of the poppy eradication program. [redacted]

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#### Possible Foreign Reaction

A country that opposes the spray eradication program or wishes to exploit its propaganda value, need not, of course, wait for such a forum. Media attention would most likely attempt to cast the program as a US-sponsored chemical warfare effort. The impact of such publicity would depend on the effectiveness of a US response and country predilections. We [redacted]

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[redacted] can speculate on official responses based on performance on other issues. The countries discussed represent the range of reaction likely. [redacted]

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United Kingdom. The British government would probably not cavil at a US-sponsored aerial spraying program unless damage to human life were particularly well-publicized and egregious. The Thatcher government gradually has become aware that the United Kingdom is developing a domestic drug problem. Although initially most heroin illicitly introduced into the country was transshipped to places like the United States or the Continent, the British have evidence that beginning in 1979 well over half of the drugs imported have been intended for the domestic black market. The public probably would be more critical, particularly in the case of proven damage to human life, with opposition to the program strongest among peace groups and members of the small Liberal Party. [redacted]

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France. We think it unlikely that public opinion would be aroused in France as a result of this program, provided that--in the event of an adverse propaganda campaign--the United States made it clear that the program was directed against drug problems. Drug use is of increasing concern in France. Moreover, the French government is, we believe, sufficiently convinced of Soviet use of chemical-biological warfare in Southeast Asia/Afghanistan that Paris could--and would--draw the necessary distinctions and not be swayed by any Soviet-generated propaganda. [redacted]

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Italy. We believe the Italian government would not give much attention to the Burmese program. There is currently a great deal of concern among Italians regarding the Mafia heroin connection and its pervasive side effects in terms of corruption and violence. Most Italians probably are sympathetic to US actions that signify a commitment to reduce the flow of opium and heroin from Burma to the world market. Some elements of the far-left Party of Democratic Proletarian Unity or the Italian Radical Party might question certain aspects of the program on the basis of humanitarian concerns, but we believe the impact of such action would be slight. [redacted]

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West Germany. We do not believe that West Germany would object to a Burmese spray eradication program. Some German cities, such as West Berlin and Frankfurt, have serious heroin problems, and the West German public would most likely favor any program that would help solve the problem. The Greens, although opposed to drug trafficking, may offer objections on the grounds that such a program could cause environmental damage and might be harmful to humans, even bringing up the Agent Orange issue. [redacted]

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Scandinavia. The Scandinavian governments are also unlikely to voice major objections. They do not condone the use of opium or heroin, and some, especially Sweden, are experiencing drug problems. The parties on the far left may use this information as a tactical ploy to criticize US policy elsewhere. For example, they may claim that such a program detracts from the evidence the US provides regarding Soviet-supported chemical warfare in Southeast Asia. These parties remain without substantial public backing, however, and such claims are unlikely to win support from other parties. [redacted]

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The Netherlands. Any publicity on aerial spraying of drug crops--again, especially if tied to the endangering of human life--is likely to elicit an adverse reaction from both the people and government of the Netherlands. The US Embassy reports that the Dutch [redacted]

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[redacted] are wary of programs in any form aimed at source countries. They stress domestic educational programs on hard drugs as more pertinent to their situation. The Dutch have a disinclination to see drugs as much of a domestic problem--some officials tend to point to resident "foreigners" as the people with a drug problem. This reluctance to admit a domestic drug problem, in addition to the Dutch history of assuming a high profile in human rights cases, would probably assure an adverse reaction to a herbicide spray program in Burma. [redacted]

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Belgium. The center-right coalition government of Prime Minister Martens probably would approach with caution any highly visible cooperation with the United States on a drug related program. [redacted]

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[redacted] In addition, although Belgium is a major transshipment point for drugs destined for the Netherlands or West Germany, the Belgians have a relatively low domestic incidence of drug abuse. If apparent human rights violations in any operation to suppress narcotics were publicized, the Belgians, who are proud of their record in that area, probably would take a position against the spray program. [redacted]

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China. We believe that China's initial reaction to a Burmese opium poppy aerial spray eradication program would be to say nothing. China is sensitive to recent reports that drugs are being transported through China from the Golden Triangle into international markets and historically supports drug control. Also, we believe that the Chinese do not wish to be drawn into supporting insurgency groups against the Burmese Government. They have cut back their support to the Burmese Communist Party (BCP) and are downplaying their role as supporters of the BCP and other insurgent groups in the Golden Triangle. In the event that a herbicide spray program became a propaganda issue of international proportions, the Chinese might even publically draw the distinction between the use of chemical warfare agents

against people in Laos and Kampuchea and the use of herbicide to kill opium poppies in Burma. [redacted]

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Japan. The response of the population and the government would depend, to a great extent, upon how well the United States prepared them for the event. We feel that a campaign to educate and alert the Japanese as to what we were trying to accomplish in Burma, why we were trying to accomplish it, and reasons why aerial spraying is the best way to do it, could blunt criticism. The Japanese police support narcotics control, but the Japanese populace generally is not aware of the seriousness of drug problems. Japanese opinion could be easily swayed by adverse propaganda against chemical warfare unless they had been well prepared in advance and were aware of the need for supporting drug control in Burma. [redacted]

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Vietnam. US support of a herbicidal eradication program would provide the Vietnamese a propaganda windfall that they might use to discredit charges that they are guilty of chemical warfare in Laos and Kampuchea. Hanoi would seek to divert attention from its use of lethal agents against anti-Vietnamese resistance groups and try to revive its Agent Orange case against the United States. [redacted]

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Soviet Union. The Soviet response is difficult to predict. The Soviets have not used the Mexican poppy eradication program in their efforts to counter US charges about Soviet use of chemical warfare in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia. Rather they have played up the US decision to develop binary chemical warfare, harked back to the US use of defoliants and herbicides in the Vietnam war, and manufactured bogus stories about germ warfare and germ warfare experimentation in Cuba and Pakistan. The Soviets, however, are very much on the defensive about chemical warfare at present, and we cannot rule out the possibility they might try to exploit a Burmese program or decide to support Vietnamese efforts to do so. [redacted]

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Others. A US role in Burmese opium eradication efforts that diluted Vietnam's "yellow rain" guilt could draw strong criticism from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). To help Vietnam's withdrawal from Kampuchea, the ASEAN states have formulated a strategy designed to keep Vietnam isolated diplomatically and economically. Consequently, they would be particularly sensitive to developments that could help Hanoi regain a measure of the sympathy it once enjoyed in the West, particularly in Scandanavia and Western Europe. [redacted]

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Burmese insurgent and ethnic groups probably would try to exploit a spray program, focusing on health hazards, damage to fields, foreign involvement, and the government's failure to compensate farmers or train them to grow alternative crops. Because of their involvement in trafficking, these groups receive little sympathy outside of Burma. Nevertheless, some traffickers--especially in the Shan United Army--have extensive

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contacts, [redacted] They--or their  
contacts--probably have connections with [redacted] journalists, who  
could make accusations that herbicides have harmed Burmese  
civilians. [redacted]

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